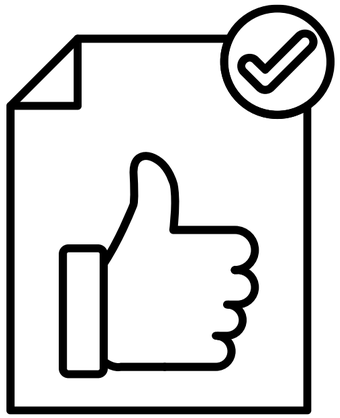


Live Q&A on Journal Rejections, Peer Review, & Manuscript Improvement

Emily Leavitt
Academic Trainer, Editage

editage

End-to-end academic publication and communication solutions

40+
Publishers

191+
Countries

500+
Universities

2,000+
Journals recommend us

1,100+
Societies

2 Million+
Projects executed

3 Million+
Researchers served

Author Services

- Scientific Writing, Editing, & Translation
- Publication Support Services
- Research Integrity and Ethical Assurance Services
- Research Dissemination Tools & Services
- Workshops and Webinars

Publisher and Corporate Solutions

- Communication Solutions
- Technology Augmentation
- Editorial & Peer Review Solutions
- Pre- & Post-Production Services

Welcome & Session Goals

Today’s Goals

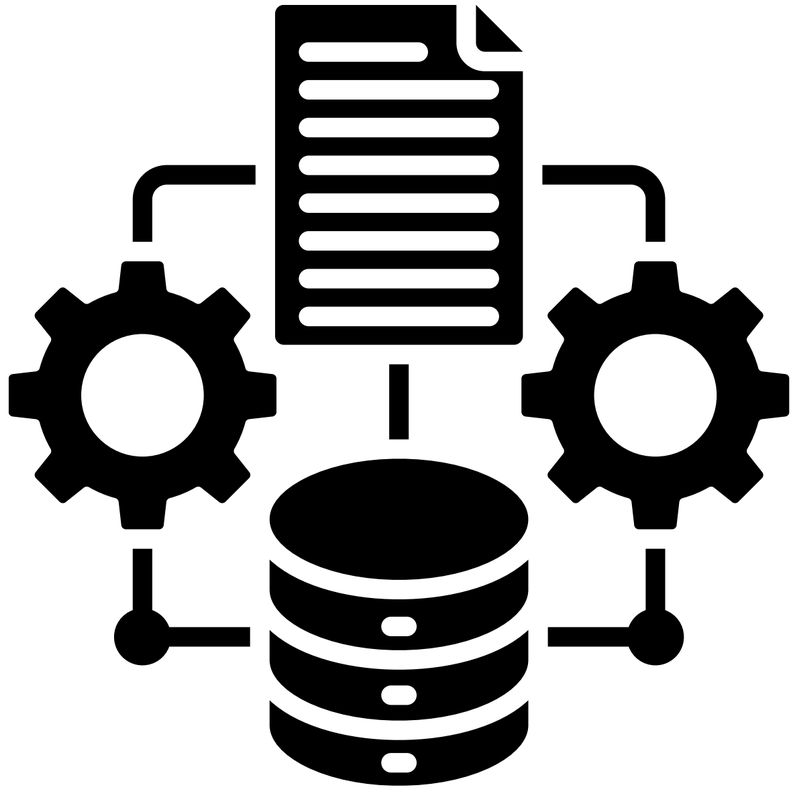
- Understand how editors evaluate manuscripts
- Learn common reasons for rejection
- Demystify peer review
- Improve revision and resubmission strategies
- Answer participant questions live

Why Good Research Still Gets Rejected

- Strong Research ≠ Automatic Acceptance
  - Common disconnects:
    - Poor journal fit
    - Unclear writing
    - Weak framing of novelty
    - Incomplete methods/reporting
    - Failure to follow journal instructions
    - Reviewer concerns left unresolved

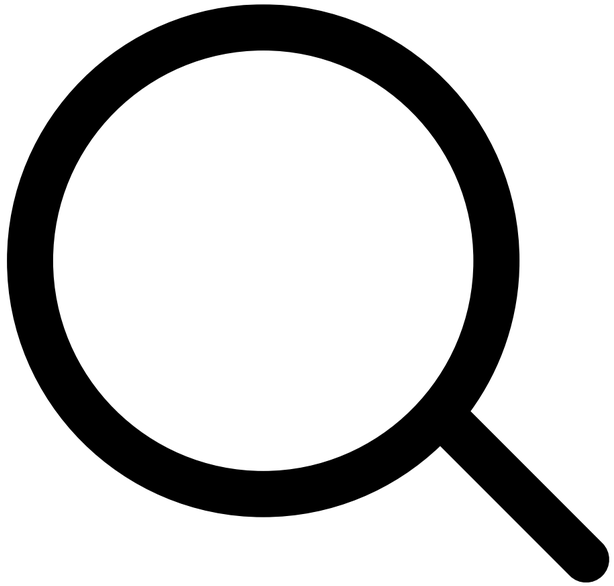
The Publication Pipeline

- What Happens After Submission?
  - Editorial screening
  - Desk rejection OR peer review invitation
  - Reviewer evaluations
  - Editorial decision
  - Revision rounds
  - Acceptance or rejection
  - Production/publication



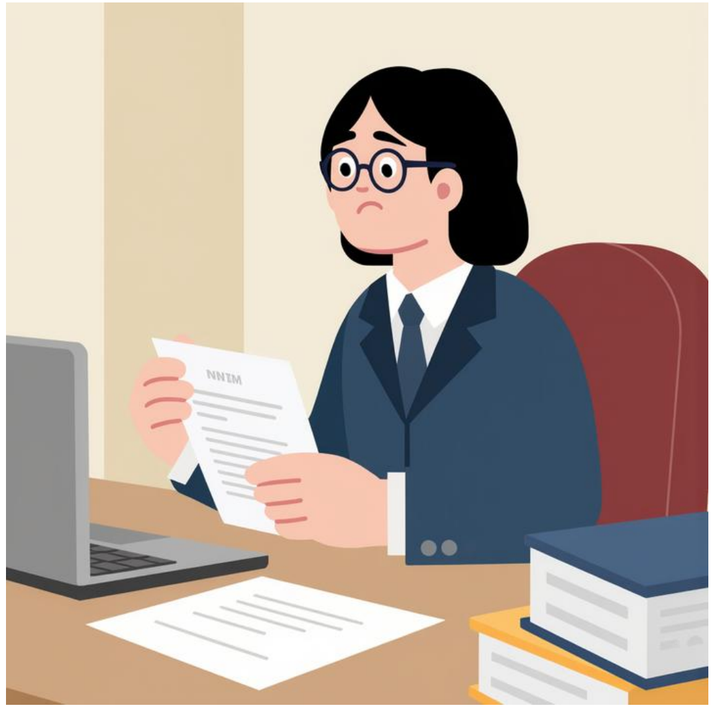
What Editors Look for First

- Initial Editorial Assessment
  - Editors commonly evaluate:
    - Scope and journal fit
    - Novelty/significance
    - Methodological soundness
    - Ethical compliance
    - Writing clarity
    - Formatting and completeness



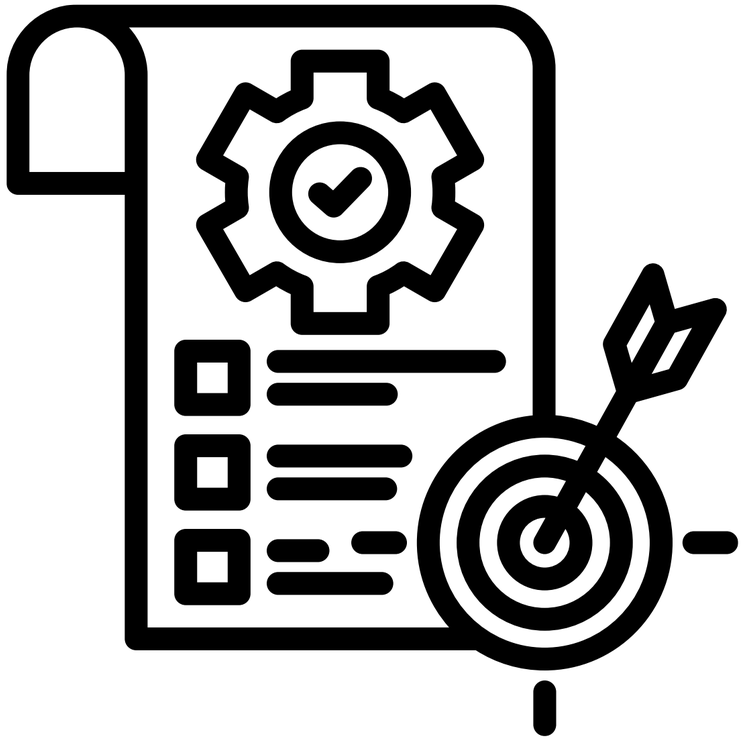
Common Reasons for Desk Rejection

- Why Manuscripts Are Rejected Before Peer Review
  - Out of scope
  - Incremental contribution
  - Poorly written abstract/introduction
  - Weak rationale
  - Methodological concerns
  - Incomplete reporting
  - Failure to follow author guidelines
  - Low perceived impact



Journal Fit Matters

- Choosing the Right Journal
  - Questions you should ask:
    - Who is the target audience?
    - Does the journal publish similar work?
    - Is the manuscript too broad or too narrow?
    - What level of novelty is expected?
    - What article types are accepted?



Anatomy of a Strong Abstract

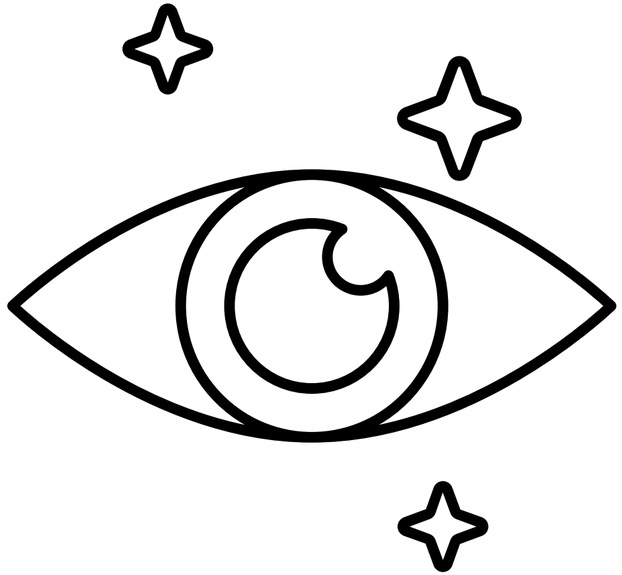
- The Abstract Is Often the First Decision
  - A strong abstract should clearly state:
    - Problem/question
    - Methods
    - Key findings
    - Significance/implications
  - Common problems:
    - Vague claims
    - Missing results
    - Excessive background
    - Overstatement

Anatomy of a Strong Abstract

- The Abstract Is Often the First Decision
  - A strong abstract should clearly state:
    - Problem/question
    - Methods
    - Key findings
    - Significance/implications
  - Common problems:
    - Vague claims
    - Missing results
    - Excessive background
    - Overstatement

Writing for Clarity

- Clear Writing Improves Reviewer Confidence
  - Strategies
    - Short, direct sentences
    - Logical flow
    - Consistent terminology
    - Strong topic sentences
    - Clear figures/tables
    - Avoid unnecessary jargon

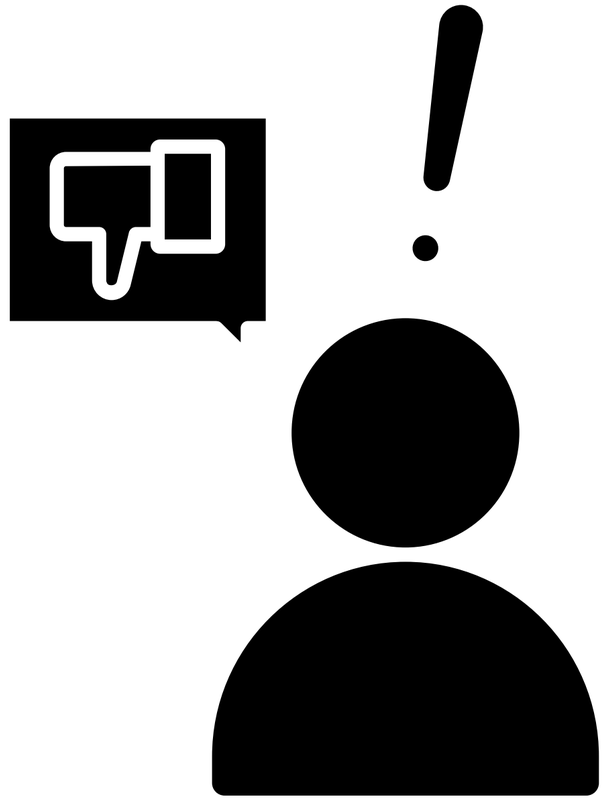


What Reviewers Typically Evaluate

- Peer Review Criteria
  - Reviewers often assess:
    - Importance of the question
    - Study design and rigor
    - Statistical analysis
    - Interpretation of results
    - Literature integration
    - Clarity of writing
    - Ethical standards

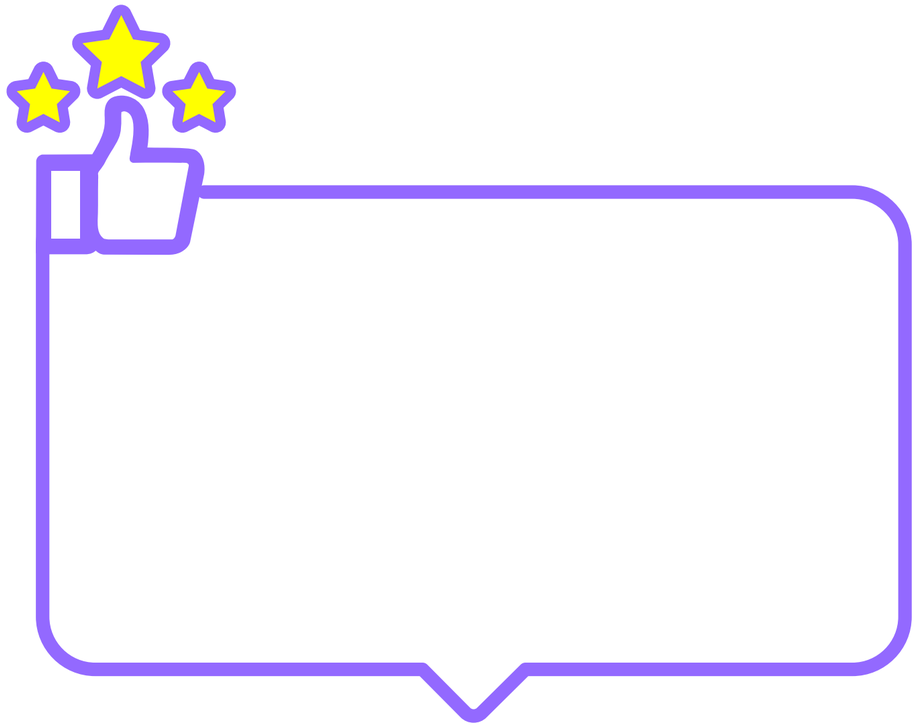
Common Reviewer Complaints

- Frequent Reviewer Critiques
  - “Novelty is limited.”
  - “Methods are unclear.”
  - “Conclusions overreach the data.”
  - “Sample size justification is weak.”
  - “Literature review is incomplete.”
  - “English needs improvement.”



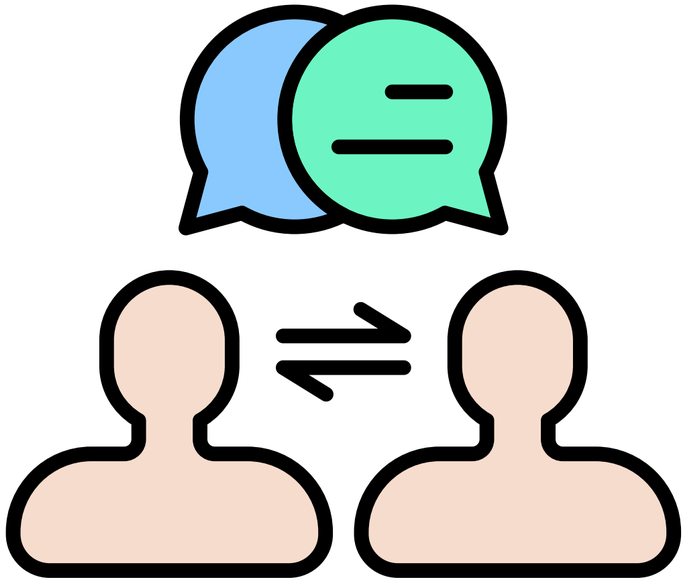
How to Respond to Reviewer Comments

- Effective Revision Strategy
  - Best practices:
    - Stay professional and calm
    - Respond point-by-point
    - Thank reviewers
    - Explain changes clearly
    - Provide manuscript line references
    - Justify disagreements respectfully



Example Reviewer Response

- Sample Response Structure:
  - Reviewer Comment: “The rationale for the control group is unclear.”
    - Strong Response: “Thank you for this observation. We clarified the rationale in the Methods section (page 6, lines 142–155) and added supporting references.”
    - Weak Response: “We disagree.”



Revising After Rejection

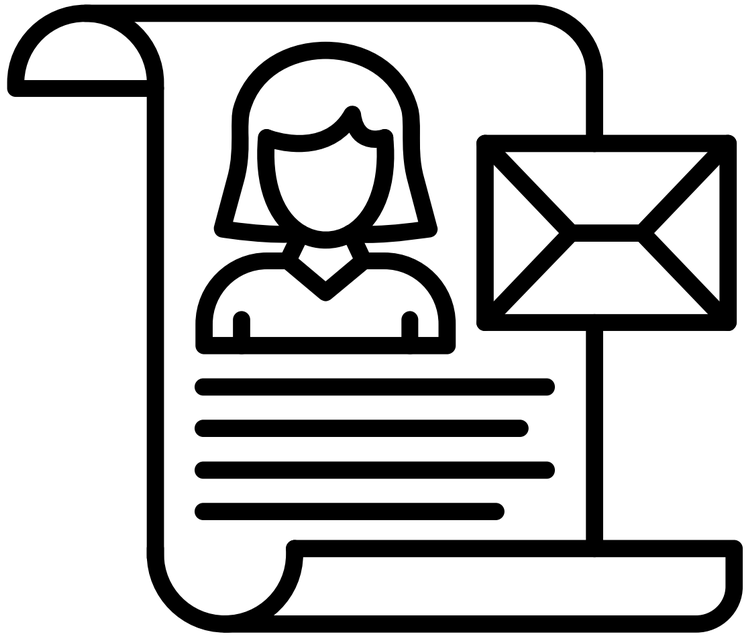
- Rejection Does Not Mean Failure!
  - Questions to ask after rejection:
    - Are critiques consistent across reviewers?
    - Are there fixable methodological issues?
    - Is journal fit the main problem?
    - Does the manuscript need reframing?
  - Possible paths:
    - Major revision
    - New target journal
    - Additional analyses
    - Collaboration/input from colleagues

Avoiding Common Submission Mistakes

- Preventable Problems
  - Checklist before submission:
    - Journal formatting complete
    - Figures/tables labeled correctly
    - References accurate
    - Ethics statements included
    - Cover letter tailored
    - Reporting guidelines followed
    - Co-author approval obtained

The Role of the Cover Letter

- Your First Conversation With the Editor
  - A good cover letter:
    - Briefly explains importance
    - States journal fit
    - Highlights novelty
    - Mentions ethical compliance
    - Avoids exaggerated claims



Ethical Concerns Editors Watch For

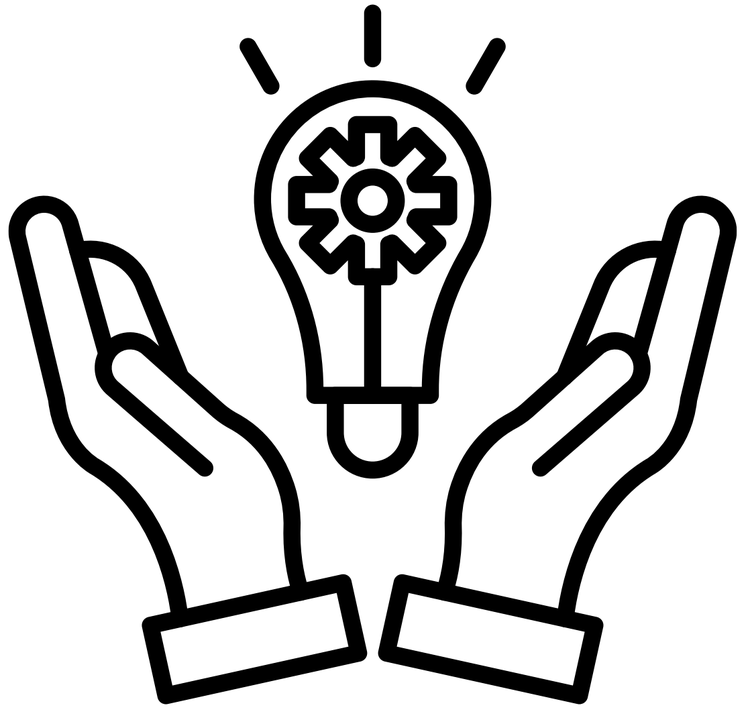
- Publication Ethics
  - Editors monitor for:
    - Plagiarism
    - Duplicate publication
    - Data manipulation
    - Authorship disputes
    - Undisclosed conflicts of interest
    - Ethical approval issues

How Long Does Peer Review Take?

- Managing Expectations
  - Typical factors affecting timeline:
    - Reviewer availability
    - Complexity of manuscript
    - Multiple revision rounds
    - Journal workload

Practical Manuscript Improvement Tips

- High-Impact Improvements
  - Strengthen the introduction narrative
  - Improve figure clarity
  - Simplify dense writing
  - Tighten discussion section
  - Clearly state contribution
  - Use reporting checklists
  - Get external feedback before submission

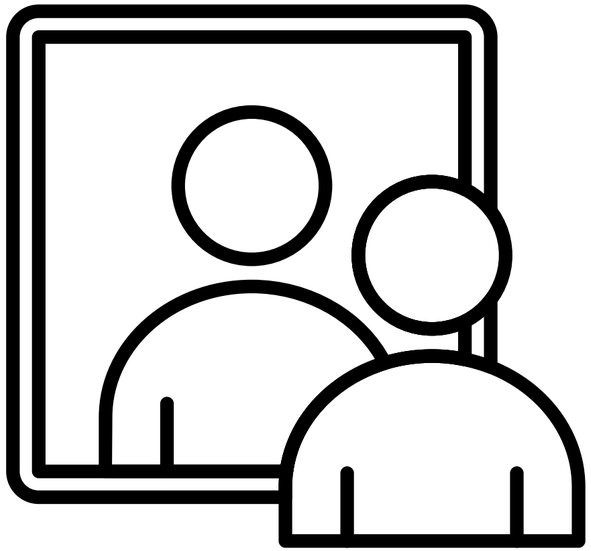


Questions Editors Wish Authors Asked Earlier

- Useful Questions Before Submission
  - Is this journal truly the best fit?
  - Is the novelty clearly stated?
  - Would a non-specialist understand the abstract?
  - Are limitations acknowledged honestly?
  - Is the discussion evidence-based?

Reflection

- Have you experienced desk rejection?
- What part of peer review is most frustrating?
- Biggest challenge: writing, journal selection, revisions, or reviewer responses?

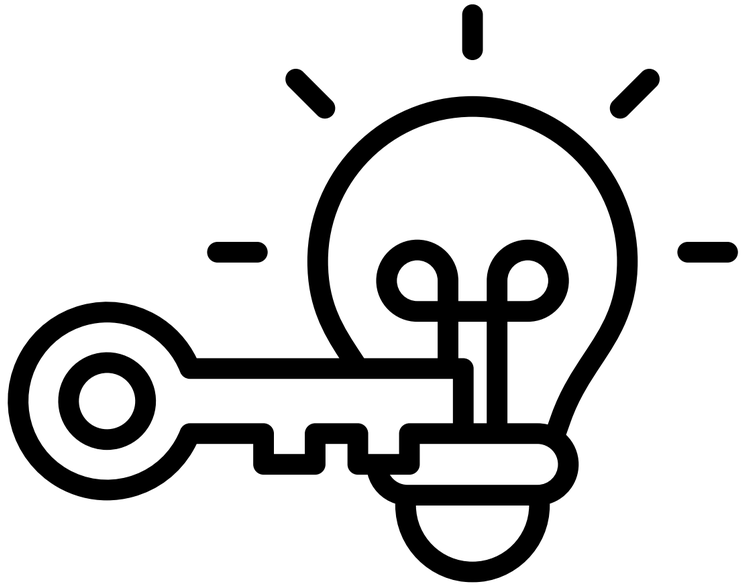


Live Q&A

- Handling contradictory reviewer comments
- Appealing editorial decisions
- Choosing between journals
- Dealing with repeated rejection
- Improving clarity for international authors

Key Takeaways

- Main Messages
  - Rejection is common and often strategic
  - Journal fit matters greatly
  - Clear writing improves outcomes
  - Reviewer comments can strengthen manuscripts
  - Professional responses matter
  - Revision is part of the publication process



Resources for Authors

- Helpful Resources
  - EQUATOR reporting guidelines
  - Journal author instructions
  - ORCID
  - COPE publication ethics guidance
  - Reference management software (e.g., Thrix)
  - Professional editing support

Thank you

Emily Leavitt
Academic Trainer

editage